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## **Killing in the Name of Love. Violence against Women in Italy**

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### **Keywords**

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## Abstract

23 November 2006 was the international Day on Violence against Women. It was also the day that the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) published its Report on Violence and maltreatments against women in and outside the family. The report covered a five-year period of research, and documented some alarming statistics, revealing that women in Italy are increasingly more vulnerable as targets of psychological and physical violence inflicted by their male partners and spouses. This widespread contemporary social phenomenon has been called 'femicide'. In order to inform and educate the audience, since 2007, RAI 3 has broadcast *Amore criminale/Criminal Love*, a weekly series featuring cases of women killed or severely injured by their husbands or partners. Furthermore, in 2012 RAI 1 produced the mini-series *Mai per amore/Never for Love*. Four films: *Troppo amore/Too Much Love* directed by Liliana Cavani; *Ragazze in web/Girls in Web* and *Helena & Glory* by Marco Pontecorvo; and *La fuga di Teresa/Theresa's Escape* by Margarethe von Trotta, were presented to raise awareness of the escalating incidence of the murder of women. The purpose of this article is first to elucidate the phenomenon of femicide in Italy; and second, to examine how RAI and Cavani's, Pontecorvo's and von Trotta's visually dramatic narratives address the cultural and sociological factors related to these forms of violence against women in Italy.

## Contributor Note

Flavia Laviosa is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Italian Studies and in the Cinema and Media Studies Program at Wellesley College. Her research interests are in European women film-makers and her articles have been published in several international journals. She is the founder and principal Editor of the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, published by Intellect. She is also the editor of the volume *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010). Currently, she is working on the book project *Framed Lives and Screened Deaths: Honor Killings in World Cinema* (University of Edinburgh Press, forthcoming).

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## Introduction

Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), reported that:

in 1992, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) formally included gender-based violence under gender-based discrimination. The process of anchoring the issue of violence against women firmly on the international agenda culminated in the adoption, without a vote, of resolution 48/104 by the General Assembly on December 20, 1993, entitled the 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women'. (2004: 162)

In 1994, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in resolution 1994/45, adopted on 4 March 1994, decided to appoint a Special Rapporteur on the causes and consequences of violence against women. Furthermore, at the end of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in 1995, the vast majority of nations adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. This international document indisputably states that women's rights are human rights. However, increased violence against women worldwide led the General Assembly of the United Nations, through the 54/134 resolution of 17 December 1999, to choose 25 November as International Day with the aim of abolishing violence against women. The UN invited governments, international organizations and NGOs to promote activities that would raise awareness of the issue.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in

2003, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was extended by the Commission on Human Rights at its 59th session in resolution 2003/45. In the same resolution the Commission on Human Rights stated:

*Strongly condemning* all acts of violence against women and girls and in this regard *called*, in accordance with the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence in the family, within the general community and where perpetrated or condoned by the State, and *emphasized* the duty of Governments to refrain from engaging in violence against women and to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women and to take appropriate and effective action concerning acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State, by private persons or by armed groups or warring factions, and to provide access to just and effective remedies and specialized, including medical assistance to the victims. *Affirmed*, in this light, that violence against women constitutes a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and that violence against women impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms.

Since March 2006, the Special Rapporteur reports to the Human Rights Council, as per Human Rights Council's

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<sup>1</sup> 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women'. *United Nations*. United Nations. 2013.

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<http://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/> [Accessed 6 January 2015].

decision 1/102. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur was most recently renewed in 2013 by resolution 23/25.

Violence against women in Italy has garnered increased international media and cinema attention in recent years. As the socio-cultural, political and legal fault lines of the twenty-first century take shape, what will be the defining national policy on murders against women? In the wake of an era of rapid changes in women's status and roles, one response is a stronger political commitment to the recognition and protection of women's rights. The dramatic confluence of social and cultural events that has made crimes against women a national crisis, crossing socio-economic lines, is portrayed in television programs and films which focus on this prevalent practice.

This article is an expression of solidarity for female victims of violence and an homage to those who have died as a result of such violence. It brings together several aspects – legal, criminal, sociological and representational – of violence against women in Italy. More specifically, it explores how state run institutions, the legal system, NGO women's organizations and the media have dealt with this phenomenon and pervasive criminal behavior. Finally, this article examines RAI's (the Italian Radio and Television broadcast) civic and educational commitment to address the factors causing sexual, psychological, physical and domestic violence with an analysis of the television programs: *Amore criminale* (Criminal Love) (2007-); and the 2012 miniseries *Mai per amore* (Never for Love) including the films: *Troppo amore* (Too Much Love) directed by Liliana Cavani, *Ragazze in web* (Girls in Web) and *Helena & Glory* by Marco Pontecorvo, and *La fuga di Teresa*

(Theresa's Escape) by Margarethe von Trotta. These television programs aim to denounce violence against women and play a major role in raising national public awareness of the life and death of the victims and the responsibilities of the perpetrators.

## Historical background of Italian legal reforms<sup>2</sup>

In Italy, the principle of honour, defined as a moral and social value, was an admitted legal defence until 1981 under Article 587 of the Rocco Penal Code.<sup>3</sup> This legislative article favoured perpetrators with a reduced penalty of imprisonment of only three to seven years for a man who killed his wife, sister or daughter to vindicate his or his family's honour. This legislation was reversed by Law 442 of 5 August 1981, which recognizes honour killing as murder.

Additionally, in line with growing international awareness and increasingly gender-sensitive legislation, the passing of Law 66 against Sexual Violence in 1996 marked a major legislative victory in Italy. After 20 years of political debate and feminist battles, a legal consensus was reached on a revised definition of the philosophical and ethical nature of rape. In Article 519 of the previous legislation, the 1931 Rocco Penal Code, sexual violence had been described as an offence against the theoretical concept of morality and the abstract principle of public decorum; therefore, there was no human victim and the assailant could avoid imprisonment by

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Italian are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by the former Zanardelli Penal Code 1890-1930.

simply paying a fine. The permissive attitude towards sexual abusers enacted by the previous legislation was overthrown by Law 66. Sexual violence finally became recognized as a crime against a person's dignity and integrity, and subsequently, the judicial system sought to enforce more severe punishments.

### **Statistics on domestic violence and abuse against women**

In 2006, the ISTAT (Italian National Statistics Institute) survey on *Violence and abuse against women in and outside the family* was conducted with the objective to provide a broad analysis of violence against women, estimate the prevalence of the phenomenon, identify the characteristics of the people involved and discern the consequences for the victims. The data gathered were relevant for the development of new policies at the institutional level and for the establishment of services needed to face the phenomenon. The report produced the following alarming statistics:

31% of women in Italy aged 16-70 years old have experienced male violence in their lifetime; 23.7% of women have experienced sexual violence and 18.8% physical violence. 6 million 743 thousand women, between 16 and 70 years of age, are estimated as victims of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime (31.9% of women in the considered age group). 5 million women were victims of sexual violence (23.7%), 3 million 961 thousand women were victims of physical violence acts (18.8%). About 1 million women were victims of rapes or attempted

rapes (4.8%). 14.3% of women in a current relationship or in a previous one, were victims of at least one episode of physical or sexual violence by their partner; considering only women with an ex-partner, percentage rises to 17.3%. 24.7% of women were victims of violent acts by another man. While physical violence is more frequently perpetrated by partners (12% against 9.8%), the opposite happens for sexual violence (6.1% against 20.4%), and this is mainly due to sexual harassment. The difference, indeed, is almost negligible as far as rapes and attempted rapes are concerned. In the year 2006, 1 million 150 thousand women (5.4%) were victims of violence.<sup>4</sup>

Additional data provided by another study conducted by ISTAT in 2006, *Il rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, Prevenzione, Contrasto* (Report on Criminality in Italy. Analysis, Prevention and Combat), revealed the following dramatic statistics about the number of women killed by their partners in these years:

1992: 97  
1993: 106  
1994: 96  
1995: 110

<sup>4</sup> *Violence and abuses against women inside and outside the family*. ISTAT 2006. The survey was the result of a partnership between ISTAT, the Institute that carried on the survey, and the Ministry for the Rights and the Equal Opportunities that provided financial support with funds from the National Operative Programme 'Safety' and 'system actions' of the European Social Fund. The sample included 25 thousand women aged between 16 and 70, telephone interviewed, widespread in all the country, from January to October 2006.

1996: 123  
1997: 121  
1998: 118  
1999: 153  
2000: 157  
2001: 193  
2002: 211  
2003: 207  
2004: 184  
2005: 157  
2006: 192  
(2006:120)

Such terrifying scenarios describe a social and domestic plague. These deaths are viewed as the consequence of the fact that women are considered private property by their male partners and are denied the right to self-determination particularly when they want to end the marital or romantic relationship. The unsettling phenomenon of suppressing women with murder is generally perceived as the result of a patriarchal value system. Italian jurist and legal scholar Tamar Pitch suggests an alternative view of these crimes, she states that they are 'a sign of impotence, and frustration rather than of legitimate authority' (2008: 9-10). These killings would be the symptom of the profound crisis of patriarchal hegemony and the expression of men's loss of identity in the public sphere (caused by unemployment, under-employment, economic disparity, cultural inferiority, social marginalization and frustration, psychological instability, alcohol/drug addiction), and loss of control in their private domain manifested through their moral inability and emotional failure (expressed with physical aggression, psychological violence, sexual abuse, obsession, excessive jealousy, folly or possessive love) to deal with women who want to assert their right to individual choices and independent decisions. It is critical to highlight that these forms of

extreme cruelty and brutality in the realm of domestic proximity occur across socio-economic and cultural lines both for men and women with a significant and disquieting higher percentage in the affluent North of Italy (Lipperini and Murgia 2013:57; Piacenti 2008: 86).

In 2005, Italian anti-violence centres and women's shelters started celebrating 25 November to raise awareness about battered, raped, abused, assaulted and murdered women. As a result of the shocking 2006 ISTAT report, political parties and women's groups organized several protests and marches in 2007: 150,000 women rallied in Rome to support action *Against violence on women*; the Network of Women in Bologna promoted both the public march *Free from violence, free to choose* in which 5,000 participated; while in Milan thousands of women took part in a demonstration held at the central railway station under the slogan *Let's come out of silence*.

### Legal reforms on stalking and femicide

Jurists, criminologists, sociologists and psychologists have defined as *femminicidio/femicide* the widespread social plague of women being killed by a man for gender-specific reasons within the domestic walls of their families or in man-woman sentimental relationships. This neologism,<sup>5</sup> which started being

<sup>5</sup> The term 'femicide' refers to the phenomenon of the female homicides in Ciudad Juárez, which involves the violent deaths of hundreds of women and girls since 1993 in the northern Mexican region of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, a border city across the Rio Grande from the U.S. city of El Paso, Texas. The term 'femminicidio' first appears officially in the



discussed in the 1990s, indicates a form of extreme violence directed specifically against women at the hands of men, and is defined as 'the killing of women by men because they are women' (Radford and Russell 1992: xiv). This new term, therefore, introduces the element of gender into the criminological analysis and raises issues of gender-based violation of human rights. As Patrizia Violi (2015) eloquently argues, 'femicide in Italy is not a state of emergency, but rather one of normalcy [...]. The death of a woman is only the tragic epilogue of a permanent state of violence'. More specifically, Violi defines femicide as a broad political category that can be applied to evaluate the complex phenomenon of individual stories of violence against women in a relationship, leading to their deaths by their partners or ex-partners. Unfortunately, the distressing statistical data reported by surveys, women's associations and the media only partially state the incidence of these often silenced and hidden forms of violence. Consequently, legislators recognized that the 1981 and 1996 laws, penalizing respectively honour killings and sexual violence, had been inadequate in addressing the newly reported and rampant acts of violence against women. They also realized that there was a legislative void in the Italian penal code since the existing legislation had not been effective in protecting

women from molestation, maltreatment, threats, psychological cruelty, physical abuse and stalking with restraining orders.

In order to criminalize violent behaviour against women, a parliamentary commission worked to elaborate a package of new laws that would regulate sanctions against the crimes of sexual harassment and *stalking*. Jurists, criminologists, psychologists and psychiatrists define *stalking* as unwanted or obsessive attention by an individual or group toward another person. Stalking behaviours are related to harassment and intimidation and may include following the victim in person or monitoring them. A new legislation was proposed in June 2008, and Law 1440 of 30 January 2009 became effective in February 2009 making stalking a criminal offence under the Article 612bis of the Italian penal code, punishable with imprisonment ranging from six months up to five years.

Furthermore, journalist Furio Stella (2013) writes that newspapers reported that in 2012 the number of women killed in Italy (in 75% of the cases by their partners or former partners, and in 63% killed in their homes) was 124, and 137 in 2011. These figures reveal that women in Italy are increasingly more vulnerable as they are also the target of psychological and physical violence inflicted by their male partners and spouses. However, criminal justice statistics on cases of domestic violence are not officially available because there is no governmental organization in charge of gathering such data, and records on medical interventions related to domestic violence or partner violence are not collected in the Italian healthcare system. There is also no national observatory on *femicide* and the

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2009 edition of the Italian language dictionary Devoto-Oli which defines the term as 'Any form of violence systematically committed against women in the name of an ideology of patriarchal origin with the intent to perpetrate women's subordination and to annihilate their identity through the physical and psychological subjugation reaching the point of slavery or death'. In June 2013 the Accademia della Crusca, the research institution on Italian language, explained the use of the term as opposed to homicide.



statistics showing an escalating number of murders of women, are those collected by the Casa delle donne per non subire violenza (House of women for not being victims of violence) in Bologna and reported by the media, which are inevitably inaccurate.

There is one national women's helpline in Italy, *Antiviolenza Donna* (Antiviolence Woman) established on 8 March 2006. The free phone number 1522 operates 24/7, provides multilingual support and is run by an independent women's group, the NGO *Telefono Rosa* (Pink Phone).<sup>6</sup> These advocates assist female survivors of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. There are 132 women's centers and 65 women's shelters in the country, 54 of which are run by independent women's NGOs, while the remaining are run by local authorities or other organizations. Although some of these centers also provide support to women survivors of sexual violence, there is no clear data on the number of women's centres for survivors of sexual violence (*Country Report* 2013).

Domestic violence in Italy is indirectly covered in the Criminal Code under different articles: Article 572 on Abuse within the family; Article 575 on Homicide; Article 582 on Injuries with healing time above 20 days; Article 605 on Kidnapping; Article 609 on Sexual

acts with minor; Article 610 on Private violence; and Article 612 on Severe threatening (*Italy-Women against violence Europe* 2012). Since 2012, the country has suddenly found itself in the spotlight for a *femicide* emergency. Politicians, civil society and media have increasingly brought attention to the issue of women being killed by their partners. The phenomenon had reached worrying levels and, in order to understand the reasons for the escalating number of femicides, Rashida Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2009-), was sent to Italy in January. In the *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences* presented after her visit, Manjoo examined the situation, described the findings, reiterated the seriousness of the situation and added a list of recommendations with special emphasis on the need to act upon the gender-specific cultural aspects of the phenomenon. She also discussed the State's response to prevent such violence, protect and provide remedies to women who had been subjected to such violence and prosecute and punish the perpetrators. More specifically, Manjoo wrote the following analysis:

The continuum of violence in the home is reflected in the increasing numbers of victims of femicide. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the number of men-on-men homicide has diminished, while the number of women murdered by men has increased. A report on femicide based on information provided by media indicates that in 2010 as many as 127 women were murdered by men. Of these, 70% were Italian and 76% of the perpetrators were also Italian. This is contrary to the common view that

<sup>6</sup> Journalist Giuliana Dal Pozzo (1922-2013), president of the association of volunteers, established in 1988 the first help line *Telefono Rosa* (Pink Phone) which has succeeded in breaking the silence on physical and psychological violence against women in the family, work place and their free time. Dal Pozzo was Director of the feminist magazine *Noi Donne* (We Women) for twenty years, Editor of the newspaper *Paese Sera*, and author of important surveys on Italian society.

such crimes are committed by foreign men, a perception reinforced by the media. In 54% of the cases of femicide, the perpetrator was either a partner or a former partner and in only 4% of the cases was the perpetrator unknown to the victim. Causes leading to these murders include separation of a couple, conflict within the relationship, honour, men's unemployment and jealousy by the perpetrator – factors which often overlap and coexist. (2012:8)

As a result of these recommendations and those made by the 2011 *Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence*, the Italian government firstly passed Law 77, on 27 June 2013, ratifying the Istanbul Convention. Later, with Law Decree 93/2013, followed by Law 119 on 'Disposizioni urgenti in materia di sicurezza e per il contrasto della violenza di genere, nonché in tema di protezione civile e di commissariamento delle province' (Urgent safety regulations to eradicate gender-based violence as well as in civil protection and administration of the provinces), it implemented measures to reduce the criminal phenomena of abuse in the family, sexual violence and stalking and enforce more severe forms of punishment. Of the new eleven articles, five pertain to violence against women and act exclusively in terms of the tightening of penalties and precautionary measures. This new legislation has been called 'Decree on femicide' even though it does not treat this crime as a gender-specific offence against women, and it does not recognize the value of centers against violence.

## **RAI contribution: information and education**

### *Amore criminale*

In order to inform and educate their audience, in 2007, RAI 3 first aired *Amore criminale* (Criminal Love), a weekly docu-drama featuring over 200 cases of women killed or severely injured by their husbands or partners. The series was first presented and narrated by Camila Raznovich (2007- 2011), later by Luisa Ranieri (2012-2013), and since 2013 by Barbara De Rossi. Written by Matilde D'Errico, Maurizio Iannelli and Luciano Palmerino, and directed by Matilde D'Errico and Maurizio Iannelli, the program was aired in the second evening timeslot for the first five seasons, with a few exceptions, and since fall 2012, it has been aired in prime time.

*Amore criminale* presents cases of 'femicide as private and individual stories, holding traditional female and male roles' (Giomi 2015:572). It also aims at delineating a psychological and socio-cultural profile of the victim and the psychopathological traits and tactics of the stalker and killer. In the spirit of RAI as public service, the program unfolds around the style of a docu-drama and journalist reportage of true crimes with careful re-enactments of the documented facts featuring actors and original footage, photos, newspapers, family videos and newsreels of local televisions. It also includes direct testimonials, recounts of the actual brutal events by the main protagonists of the stories (family members, friends, co-workers, plaintiffs' lawyers and defenders, police officers, medical doctors and magistrates), and interviews with women survivors of their partner's brutal violence. Each story is dramatic, but the series is narrated in soft tones with

chiaroscuro lighting and in a respectful manner that never falls into the theatricality of a television spectacle, nor does indulge in macabre voyeurism with shocking images and sensationalistic tones.

*Each man kills the thing he loves* is the theme song of the program and it is precisely the cult song performed by the French actress, director and screenwriter Jeanne Moreau. The song *Each man kills the thing he loves* is an excerpt of Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1897). As the soundtrack of the program, it introduces the opening credits on the screen with a background of sketchy drawings of symbols of love and murder repeatedly associated with over-imposed images of a red heart turning into a gun and a knife.

Each episode includes two stories, one about a woman who survived and the second about a woman who was murdered by her partner. The stories reveal that the phenomenon takes place in all geographical areas in Italy, in the North as well as in the South. Many of these women have children and the program also addresses issues of legal custody and psychological support. The 2014 edition paid more attention to those women who had the courage to report their aggressors and were able to get out of the nightmare of physical and psychological violence. This new direction of the program is meant to send the message that each woman can change her life. In each episode, professional theatre, cinema or television actors present the male point of view, reading pages of the judicial proceedings of the stories. The program has relied on the advice of psychologist and criminologist Anna Costanza Baldry and lawyer Géraldine Pagano who work to

give justice to the victims who have lost their life and dignity.

It is crucial to mention that *Amore criminale* systematically avoids interviewing the men accused and convicted for the crimes, thus leaving out a critical tassel in the analysis of each story. The deliberate absence of the perpetrators' point of view, the omission of their version of the stories, the silence on their own explanation or justification of the actions leading to their women's death are not missing relevant elements that would shed light in the individual incident. On the contrary, their absence speaks louder than their own words, and in doing so the producers of the program intentionally avoid to spectacularize the men as modern (anti)-heroes. The laudable educational purpose of *Amore criminale* is to break the deafening silence around domestic violence and reach female victims and male perpetrators of such violence inside the walls and halls of their homes and the secrecy of their family lives. The program consistently addresses violence generated by a distorted, possessive, excessive and unhealthy form of love that often leads men to commit extreme acts of violence and even to kill their beloved partners. Stories of this kind have always existed, the difference is that now they are more publicized, more frequently broadcast, and more carefully examined.

Psychologist Piera Serra (2014), in her open letter to Anna Maria Tarantola, the President of RAI, reports the results of a study conducted on three consecutive episodes (3, 11 and 17 November 2014) of *Amore Criminale*. In this article Serra vehemently criticizes the program claiming that the 'content [...] might not only neutralize the desired outcome, but even, in case the viewer is a man who

wishes to kill his partner of former partner, be counterproductive'. More specifically, Serra engages in a discussion on how individual cases are portrayed on television providing a detailed analysis of the misleading terminology used to draw a psychological profile of the characters involved in each story. Serra also identifies the ambiguities of the messages conveyed in the representation of each case, thus proving that *Amore criminale* perpetrates stereotypical images of the victim and her aggressor by offering inaccurate definitions of the binary and interdependent causes of violence: male jealousy, passion, folly, anger or depression and female lack of emotional strength, will power, or self-esteem. Serra's in-depth and critical reading of form, content and representational choices in the RAI 3 program is precise and informative. In addition to paying attention to her study, it is relevant to focus on the program producers' intent since 2007 to use media as a means of intervention, taking on the role as leading advocates for the violation of women's human rights. *Amore criminale's* objective is to recreate prototypical characters and exemplary figurations, and its impact is to magnify the complex and unambiguous truths about women's gender struggles in Italy.

#### *Mai per amore*

In addition to *Amore criminale*, in 2012 Claudia Mori produced the television mini-series titled *Mai per amore*, aired by RAI 1 on Tuesdays at prime time in the evening. The tetralogy included the films: *Troppo amore* by Liliana Cavani; *Ragazze in web* and *Helena & Glory* by Marco Pontecorvo; and *La fuga di Teresa* by Margarethe von Trotta, all set in Trieste. The purpose for these films was to raise

public awareness on the escalating phenomenon of women victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence. The soundtrack of the television series was the 2011 eponymous song *Mai per amore* written and performed by the Italian rock star Gianna Nannini.

*Troppo amore* tells the story of Livia (Antonia Liskova), 28 years old, juggling her studies and work, and Umberto (Massimo Poggio), a 40 year old attractive university professor of art history. Slowly, Umberto's love for Livia becomes excessive and obsessive, thus controlling and possessing her life through a gradual escalation of episodes of physical and emotional violence. Livia is confused by Umberto's declarations of absolute love and she is unable to realize the danger she is in, thus ignoring her friends' warnings and family's recommendations. After finding herself in real physical danger after Umberto's extremely violent episodes of stalking, she comes to terms with her situation, runs away and recriminates her own actions and poor judgment. *Stalking is the central theme of the film. It is the manifestation of the male partner's love. After conquering the woman's trust, the man considers her as his personal property, controls her mind and actions, movements and decisions, and punishes her by beating her when she disobeys, hides her decisions, or lies to him. The man is unable to accept that his woman is an independent person.*

Cavani, who collaborated in the screenplay writing with Angelo Pasquini and Roberto Tiraboschi, produces images that shake the audience showing, without ambiguities, how love can degenerate into pathological control of the other. The choice of Umberto, a wealthy and highly educated man, is meant to demonstrate that certain



dramas exist across the socio-cultural spectrum. Umberto claims that he loves Livia, but he intends to dominate her life, exercise surveillance over her movements, and make decisions for her, keeping her away from her own family and holding her prisoner in his elegant and isolated villa. After a short period of romance, Umberto's violence leaves Livia a helpless victim unable to escape the sedition. Her fear and shame elicit a sense of guilt for causing the violence, a typical feeling of many women who prefer not to confide in their friends or close family. These women choose not to report their tyrant hoping that each episode of violence would be the last. However, when she finally realizes that her life is in danger and attempts to escape, the prosecution, the stalking begins.

*Ragazze in web* chronicles the friendship between Claudia (Carolina Crescentini) and Silvia (Francesca Inaudi), two 20 year old university students who share an apartment. Claudia, who is from a low income family, has found a quick, easy and rather transgressive way to earn money. She opts to sell her beautiful body on the web in order to gain financial independence. Silvia, on the other hand, comes from an affluent family. When she finds out what Claudia has been doing for a living, she is initially shocked, but then she decides to follow her roommate's example, trusting that it would be the simplest way to earn money. Subsequently, the two young women become accomplices and partners in business. Claudia sets a personal rule, a safe threshold: to keep her virtual life separate from her real life. She asks Silvia to abide by this rule as well. Soon, Silvia regrets her choice and abruptly ends her friendship with Claudia. In the meantime, Silvia proves to be sensitive to the courtship of an ardent

admirer. Long night conversations on the web with the cameras on, showing each other's faces, strengthen trust and attraction. Claudia decides to meet her pursuer, but this decision changes the lives of both Claudia and Silvia in an unexpected ending. The theme of the film, directed by Pontecorvo with a screenplay by Andrea Purgatori, is the danger of violence inherent in online relationships that is too often underestimated, especially by young people.

*La fuga di Teresa* is about Teresa (Nina Torresi), sixteen years old, who studies at a college abroad. She is unable to accept her mother Laura's (Stefania Rocca) suicide. Her father (Alessio Boni) is a renowned and highly regarded physician. Even though he is saddened by his wife's loss, he believes that her depression was the sole cause of her death. In order to unveil the truth, Teresa digs into her memories. She yearns to know what happened to her mother who, after abandoning her brilliant career as a manager, lived in voluntary isolation. Teresa runs away with her friend Miki, an eighteen year old, rebellious boy, who is willing to help Teresa out of his love for her. The journey that Miki hoped would be a romantic escape is instead Teresa's plan to recollect her memories. Visiting places and meeting her mother's old friends and acquaintances, Teresa finds out the disquieting truth about her mother's death. In this film, von Trotta represents the psychological domestic violence hidden in a seemingly calm and harmonious bourgeois home, which turned to be ferocious and emotionally debilitating for Teresa's mother. The film has the structure of a psychological thriller and at the end poses the question whether a suicide is the responsibility of the person who has led the victim to such an act. Von Trotta

chooses to address psychological violence as this is a more insidious and less traceable form of abuse, and typical of men who are afraid to lose their control over their women's will and mind.

*Helena & Glory*, instead, is a film about the exploitation of foreign and clandestine prostitutes who are easily threatened and blackmailed. Particularly, the film is about the strong and loyal friendship between two women, both prostitutes. Glory (Esther Ortega), from Romania, is an exuberant and cheerful woman with a great musical talent, and Helena (Barbora Bobulova), from Ukraine, is reserved, quiet, alone, bitter and disillusioned after her husband's cheating and abandonment, which left her hopeless and without a future. Helena is a victim of organized crime around prostitution, of which her ex-husband's is a member. Glory instead is a free prostitute who has come to Italy to earn money quickly in order to pay a large debt in her country and support her family. She is part of a large and very supportive community from Romania. The two women share the courage to rebel. Helena, the main character in the story, suffers from a deep conflict: her oppressor and exploiter, Christian, is also her son's father. In order to regain her psychological freedom and moral dignity, Helena, helped by Glory, will have to face many vicissitudes. The story unfolds as an action thriller with moments of high suspense with an unexpected ending

The television series *Mai per amore* represents the plethora of ways violence against women manifests itself in Italy. Each film offers vivid portrayals of women's lives, all victims of criminal acts at the hands of their male partners. Effective and varied dramaturgies unveil stories of abuse, fear and death in the four dramas where criminal behaviour is

perpetrated across socio-economic classes and educational boundaries. Cavani's, von Trotta's and Pontecorvo's contributions represent the crucial encounter of art and media as informative and educational forces. These directors bring different cultural perspectives to their films and use diverse narrative styles, pioneering efforts to report these crimes as a national challenge to contemporary humanity. They actively denounce violence against women, and play a major role in raising public awareness of the victims and perpetrators. Journalists and filmmakers take journeys into diverse geographical areas, exploring stories and dramas in communities of marked gender inequalities. They portray a kaleidoscope of people, whose values deny women the right to free choice and mobility in Italy.

## Conclusion

Violence against women has been the focus of journalists, filmmakers, sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, legislators and political activists for several decades in Italy. It has been portrayed in films, dramatized on stage, reported in documentaries and televised in special programs. Such complex representation of real life stories indicates the socially committed effort from experts and artists to intervene and contribute at the educational and legislative levels in order to inform people, prevent violence, protect women, assist victims of violence and enforce more rigorous forms of punishment.

However, violence, and more precisely domestic violence, continues to affect many women in Italy. Most manifestations are underreported as often they are not perceived as crimes;

victims are economically dependent on the perpetrators; and perceptions persist that the state responses will not be appropriate or helpful. Although the legal framework provides for civil protection, the lengthy criminal procedure, delays in the justice system, the slow implementation of civil protection, the inadequate pecuniary and detention sanctions against perpetrators and lack of effective remedy for women victims of violence, have a detrimental impact on the outcome of a case. These factors inevitably contribute to the silencing of the victims and invisibility of violence: its causes and consequences.

Psychologists explain that the reason for such violence is the power struggle within a couple. Violence is used to assert male control as the ultimate expression of possession over a woman. As women become more independent, the phenomenon worsens because the unbalance and asymmetry between the two partners widens. Furthermore, sociologists report that violence against women holds high human, emotional,

existential, medical and legal costs for the victims, their children and other family members. Women experience a reduced quality of life in the family, work place and society at large.

In conclusion, although Italian institutions pay more attention to the punitive aspects of violence against women through the implementation of laws meant to prevent or handle episodes of violence and crisis, forms of educational intervention and social awareness would be more effective and would produce enhanced and long-lasting results. A different culture of man-woman relationships would need to be fostered to articulate socio-ethical codes that recognize human dignity and attribute meaning and value to women's lives. The way in which Italian society will give priority to these principles, and the way in which institutions will respond to violence against women will shape the future of Italian men and women.

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